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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BDG CONCESSIONS DEFUSE KANSAT UPRISING

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Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, Reason 1.4(d)

11. (SBU) Late April 16, demonstrators in Kansat (reftel) and the BDG struck a deal ending a three-month popular uprising over electricity prices and regulation. Except for the resignation of local BNP MP Shahjahan Miah, the BDG delegation of five senior area BNP leaders conceded every demand by the demonstrators, who in return called off the nationwide strike called for April 20. Residents have started returning to their homes, schools have reopened, and normal economic activity is resuming.

12. (C) The opposition Awami League (AL), however, appears set to continue with its strike plans, which it says are to mourn the approximately 19 persons killed over the course of the Kansat demonstrations as well as express solidarity for the demands of the people of Kansat. AL organizing secretary Akhtaruzzaman told us that the opposition 14-party alliance would review the situation on April 18, but that their strike would likely continue.

13. (SBU) The BDG delegation, headed by State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mirza Alamgir, agreed to reduce power prices, compensate victims of police violence, end monthly meter charges, release detained demonstrators, and drop related charges. It will also end fines for late payments, illegal connections to religious buildings, and stolen lines and transformers.

14. (C) Baharul Islam, Deputy Inspector General of Police for Rajshahi, told poloff that the people are now "calm and happy and things are back to normal." However, he admitted, many of the BDG concessions, like reduced periods of load shedding, will be difficult as "it's not possible to increase power supplies overnight." He asserted, though, that much of the discontent centered not on the supply of electricity but on the administration of the electricity board. For example, he said, locals were outraged when valuable fruit trees were cut down for the installation of new cables. Islam blamed Golam Rabbani, the leader of the demonstrators, with exploiting the situation for political gain. Jatiya Party member Kamran Chowdhury told poloff that the BDG "won't be able to honor their agreement," and that the deal was only to "to get some time." The real winner, he stated, was Rabbani, who "overnight has been created a leader."

15. (C) Comment: After ignoring Kansat for three months, the BNP dramatically defused the crisis with a stunning array of

concessions. The media, with graphic coverage of police violence against demonstrators, played a large role in building sympathy for Kansat among civil society and putting pressure on the BDG to act. Kansat, previously a BNP safe seat, will further heighten BNP sensitivity over power problems as a major political liability going into the next election. Many Bangladeshis will wonder whether Kansat will encourage other rural areas, which have seen episodic protests against power outages, to become more aggressive.

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